

VZCZCXRO3542
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #0097/01 0091750

ZNY SSSS ZZH
P 091750Z JAN 09
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3789
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHG/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0161
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000097

NOFORN
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; DRL FOR HARRIS/JOHNSTONE; NSC
FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL; PRM FOR RAMGOOLIE/BROOKS-RUBIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [ICRC](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [GZ](#) [PREF](#)
SUBJECT: ICRC AND PCRS DETAIL HORRIFIC SCENES IN EVACUATION
FROM ZAYTUN

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary. An International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) statement on January 8 described the discovery of four children next to their dead mothers and at least 12 dead bodies in a house in Gaza City's Zaytun neighborhood. A Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) medical worker present when the children were discovered told Poloff that an IDF unit was operating out of the same house. ICRC contacts in Gaza say the unit was nearby in a different house. Full text of ICRC statement at para 8. End Summary.

¶2. (U) ICRC issued a statement from its Geneva headquarters on January 8 describing the evacuation of the Zaytun neighborhood in Gaza on January 7. The ICRC statement reported the discovery of four children next to their dead mothers and at least 12 corpses in a house in the Zaytun neighborhood of southern Gaza City.

PRCS/ICRC Evacuation from Zaytun

¶3. (C) Khalid Abu Zayd, a PRCS medical worker present during the recovery of the injured Zaytun, told Poloff January 9 that a PRCS/ICRC team evacuated four houses January 7 between 1300 and 1530 local time. He said PRCS and ICRC had sought IDF permission for several days to enter the neighborhood and evacuate casualties. He said that, PRCS/ICRC found three dead bodies in the first house; one dead body in the second house 50 meters away; and fifteen injured, including five children and seven women, and a dead woman and dead boy in a nearby third house.

¶4. (C) In the fourth Zaytun house that PRCS/ICRC entered, Abu Zayd told Poloff he found four children and sixteen corpses in the house. He said an IDF unit was operating from the same house in a nearby room and the soldiers "certainly" knew there were dead bodies in the house. He reiterated to Poloff that the soldiers were "two meters" away from the bodies, noting that some soldiers were asleep in the house when ICRC/PRCS entered. The team left the corpses and evacuated the wounded to PRCS's al-Quds hospital in Gaza City by 1600. Press reports indicate that PRCS workers were required by the IDF not to bring mobile phones or cameras with them during the evacuation.

¶5. (C) Antoine Grand, head of the ICRC Gaza office, told Poloff by phone January 9 that the IDF unit was in a separate structure 80 meters away from the house with the four children. Grand said the IDF was entrenched in Zaytun and aware that there were numerous casualties in need of assistance. Testimony gathered January 5 by B'tselem, an Israeli human rights NGO, also alleges that IDF soldiers were operating in the neighborhood of the house and had been in

contact with some family members.

16. (U) ICRC reported evacuating 30 people from Zaytun on January 7 and 103 on January 8. ICRC believes more wounded and dead remain in Zaytun and require evacuation. ICRC suspended most of its Gaza operations following several incidents where UN and ICRC vehicles were attacked by IDF forces in spite of coordination (see details septel).

17. (S/NF) GRPO information indicates that elements of the IDF's 401st Armored Brigade, as well as a second unidentified mechanized brigade, were operating south of Gaza City during the time in question.

ICRC Press Statement

18. (U) The text of ICRC's January 8 statement follows.

Begin Text:

On the afternoon of 7 January, four Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulances and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) managed to obtain access for the first time to several houses in the Zaytun neighborhood of Gaza City that had been affected by Israeli shelling. The ICRC had requested safe passage for ambulances to access this neighborhood since 3 January but it only received permission to do so from the Israeli Defence Forces during the afternoon of 7 January.

The ICRC/PRCS team found four small children next to their

JERUSALEM 00000097 002 OF 002

dead mothers in one of the houses. They were too weak to stand up on their own. One man was also found alive, too weak to stand up. In all there were at least 12 corpses lying on mattresses.

In another house, the ICRC/PRCS rescue team found 15 other survivors of this attack including several wounded. In yet another house, they found an additional three corpses. Israeli soldiers posted at a military position some 80 meters away from this house ordered the rescue team to leave the area which they refused to do. There were several other positions of the Israeli Defence Forces nearby as well as two tanks.

"This is a shocking incident," said Pierre Wettach, the ICRC's Head of Delegation for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. "The Israeli military must have been aware of the situation but did not assist the wounded. Neither did they make it possible for us or the Palestine Red Crescent to assist the wounded."

Large earth walls erected by the Israeli army had made it impossible to bring ambulances into the neighbourhood. Therefore, the children and the wounded had to be taken to the ambulances on a donkey cart. In total, the ICRC/PRCS rescue team evacuated 18 wounded and 12 others who were extremely exhausted. Two corpses were also evacuated. The ICRC/PRCS will recover the remaining corpses on Thursday.

The ICRC was informed that there are more wounded sheltering in other destroyed houses in this neighbourhood. It demands that the Israeli military grant it and PRCS ambulances safe passage and access immediately to search for any other wounded. Until now, the ICRC has still not received confirmation from the Israeli authorities that this will be allowed. The ICRC believes that in this instance the Israeli military failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded. It considers the delay in allowing rescue services access unacceptable.

End text.

WALLES